

# Space race to bring supplies to astronauts

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 03.18.15

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Seen here is SpaceX's unmanned Dragon cargo spacecraft docked to the International Space Station with a load of supplies and equipment for the station crew. Photo: NASA

WASHINGTON — Bringing groceries to the astronauts on the International Space Station may not be as cool as bringing the astronauts themselves into space. A few companies are fighting for the job anyway.

NASA is the U.S. space agency. It is having companies compete to fly food and supplies to the station in unmanned rocket ships.

People who study the business of space travel say the competition among the companies is a good sign. It means that spaceflights run by businesses is seeing a new life.

## Companies Compete To Win

In the past, the government sent people into space through NASA. Now, NASA is not receiving enough money from the government to do all of the projects it wants to do. Instead, it is hiring other companies to help.

At least five space companies have sent in proposals for the work. The proposals are ideas of what the companies would build. They have to build rocket ships that can travel to the space station unmanned, or without a pilot.

Even big companies want the job. Boeing and Lockheed Martin are large businesses that often work with the military. The two companies did not try to work with NASA in the past, but just now sent in their plans. It seems NASA has created an intense competition among companies.

## **NASA Has A Plan**

Years ago, NASA created a plan to give people from private companies the job to transport supplies to the space station. NASA said it did not have enough money to transport supplies. Instead, NASA decided to have its scientists do more important research, such as studying Mars.

Some lawmakers disagreed with the decision. They argued that businesses could not be trusted with such important work. They said spaceflights should be left to NASA. Since then, NASA's decision to use companies gave many space businesses a boost.

Two different types of companies want to work with NASA. Some of them are companies that are used to designing military weapons and planes, like Boeing. Others are new startup companies that are interested in space.

For the past few years, two startup companies have been sending supplies to the space station.

One of them is SpaceX. The company is run by billionaire Elon Musk. NASA gave it \$1.6 billion to send supplies to the space station. So far, SpaceX has made five trips to space and the company is scheduled for a sixth trip in April.

The other company to win the cargo contract is Orbital Sciences, which is now called Orbital ATK. Last year, it had a rocket explode just after takeoff. No one was on board. The explosion made people question if NASA should be using so many private businesses for space work.

## **Space Travel Is Becoming Popular**

Still, NASA keeps giving new jobs to companies. One reason is that people at NASA are excited by SpaceX's success. However, the work is also necessary. The government has given NASA less and less money. NASA has to hire contractors to do the work, experts say.

The space start-ups are able to get money from other companies or banks. In January, SpaceX received a \$1 billion investment from Google and Fidelity Bank.

A few years ago, people were not as interested in giving money to those who wanted to go to space.

SpaceX changed that. The company's successful launches made the startup famous. It also demonstrated that there is money to be made in space.

Last year, NASA gave contracts to SpaceX and Boeing to take astronauts to the space station. The contracts were worth \$6.8 billion. Now, it is looking for another company to work with to deliver supplies.

## **Looking At Orion**

Boeing thinks it has a good shot. The company recently got to take astronauts to the space station. Its CST-100 capsule was originally made for astronauts. It could easily be rebuilt to handle supplies, said John Mulholland, who helps lead Boeing's space programs.

Even though it had an explosion in October, Orbital ATK said it has a good shot, too.

"We've proven the system works," spokesman Barron Beneski said.

A spokesman for SpaceX still will not say whether it will apply for the contract. Many experts think it definitely will apply.

Lockheed Martin, a huge military and plane manufacturing company, is interested as well. The company is promising to show a small group of people their rocket idea. They will show it off at a private party very soon.

Lockheed makes the Orion space capsule. NASA used the Orion on a historic mission late last year. The Orion sent a spacecraft farther than any vehicle designed to carry humans had gone in 40 years. No one was onboard the test flight of the Orion, which will someday carry astronauts into deep space.

## Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the section "NASA Has A Plan" that BEST explains why NASA gave contracts to private companies.
- 2 Which of the sentences from the section "Companies Compete To Win" explains what NASA has asked the companies to do?
  - (A) Boeing and Lockheed Martin are large businesses that often work with the military.
  - (B) They have to build rocket ships that can travel to the space station unmanned, or without a pilot.
  - (C) In the past, the government sent people into space through NASA.
  - (D) It seems NASA has created an intense competition among companies.
- 3 Which of the following excerpts from the article is NOT a key supporting detail for the main idea of the article?
  - (A) Bringing groceries to the astronauts on the International Space Station may not be as cool as bringing the astronauts themselves into space.
  - (B) NASA is the U.S. space agency. It is having companies compete to fly food and supplies to the station in unmanned rocket ships.
  - (C) People who study the business of space travel say the competition among the companies is a good sign. It means that spaceflights run by businesses is seeing a new life.
  - (D) In the past, the government sent people into space through NASA. Now, NASA is not receiving enough money from the government to do all of the projects it wants to do. Instead, it is hiring other companies to help.

Which of the following paragraphs BEST supports the title of the article?

- (A) Even big companies want the job. Boeing and Lockheed Martin are large businesses that often work with the military. The two companies did not try to work with NASA in the past, but just now sent in their plans. It seems NASA has created an intense competition among companies.
- (B) Some lawmakers disagreed with the decision. They argued that businesses could not be trusted with such important work. They said spaceflights should be left to NASA. Since then, NASA's decision to use companies gave many space businesses a boost.
- (C) Still, NASA keeps giving new jobs to companies. One reason is that people at NASA are excited by SpaceX's success. However, the work is also necessary. The government has given NASA less and less money. NASA has to hire contractors to do the work, experts say.
- (D) Lockheed makes the Orion space capsule. NASA used the Orion on a historic mission late last year. The Orion sent a spacecraft farther than any vehicle designed to carry humans had gone in 40 years. No one was onboard the test flight of the Orion, which will someday carry astronauts into deep space.

## Answer Key

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**Paragraph 6:**

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Which of the following paragraphs BEST supports the title of the article?

- (A) **Even big companies want the job. Boeing and Lockheed Martin are large businesses that often work with the military. The two companies did not try to work with NASA in the past, but just now sent in their plans. It seems NASA has created an intense competition among companies.**
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